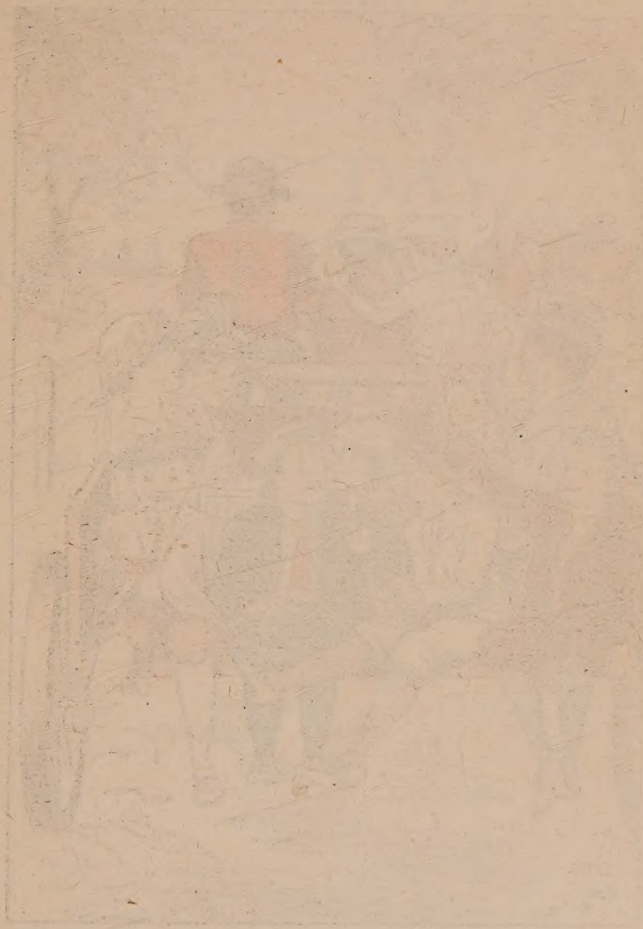
PICNIC DAY AT MERRYVALE

ALICE HALE BURNETT



The boys, sitting at the back of the wagon, all sang at the top of their voices.

THE MERRYVALE BOYS

PICNIC DAY AT MERRYVALE

BY

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PICNIC DAY AT MERRYVALE

CHAPTER I

PLANNING THE PICNIC

"Oh, Mother, may we go to the Sunday School picnic?" cried Toad, bursting into Mother Brown's sitting room one sunny afternoon. "Everybody's going."

"Come in, Thomas," said his mother, "and tell me where you have been. Your brother Charley came home from school over an hour ago."

"I know it," said Toad, for Thomas was called Toad by his friends. "I had to stay in after school. It was Mary

Ryan again. That girl's so easy to tease,—why, you only have to untie her hair ribbon and she boo-hoos."

"Is that what you did to-day, Thomas?" asked his mother.

"No, Mother. To-day I untied her apron strings and tied them around the back of her seat, and," giggled Toad, "when she started to get up she sat down in a hurry. Of course all the rest of us laughed and that made her cry. But it's half her fault, Mother. I wouldn't think of doing things if she wasn't so easy to tease."

"I'm afraid you missed a good time, Thomas," said Mother. "Charley and your father have gone for a ride."

"Oh, I'm sorry! But, Mother, may

we go to the picnic?" again asked Toad. "I met Mrs. Whiting on the way home and she told me it would be next Saturday."

"It's just the thing," answered Mother. "Of course you may go. When I was young we always had a big picnic every year, and everybody went. Only the dogs were left at home."

"Oh, goody, goody!" shouted Toad, hopping about on one foot, as he always did when he was pleased.

"Then," continued Mother, "we would fill the large farm wagon full of hay and pile the lunch baskets up front; then in got young and old. I remember I always liked to sit by our hired man and help him drive the team."

"Were they big horses, as big as ours?" asked Toad.

"I'm sure they were," answered Mother, "and such a shiny black. I remember how fast they could go."

"Could we go that way just once?" cried Toad. "And could I sit up front like you used to do?"

"Perhaps," said Mother, "I'll see," and a merry light danced in her soft brown eyes.

"Oh, that's fine!" said Toad, giving his mother a big hug, then away he flew out of the room and the house to find Reddy, his best boy friend. Of course his real name was not Reddy, but he was called so because of the color of his hair. He was not hard to find, for as Toad

turned in at his gate an apple hit him on the shoulder.

"Hey, what's that?" called Toad, and looking up he saw a grinning face peeping out at him through the branches of a large tree.

"Come on down!" shouted Toad.

"Come on up," was the answer. "Here's a seat and plenty of apples."

"All right," answered Toad, "I'll come," and in less time than it takes to tell Toad was up the tree beside Reddy.

"Did you know next Saturday will be Sunday School Picnic?" asked Toad, munching an apple.

"Oh, good!" answered Reddy.

"Can you go?" was Toad's next question. "Mother says we can."

"Oh, yes, I always do, and so does Fat," replied Reddy.

Fat, whose right name was Frank, was Reddy's elder brother.

"And," continued Reddy, "last year Fat ate so much chocolate it made him awfully sick. He's sort of lost his taste for it since."

"There are Dad and Chuck coming up the road now in the buggy!" cried Toad. "Let's get a hitch on the back."

In a moment both boys were down the tree and racing out to catch the carriage.

"Where have you been, Dad?" called Toad to Father Brown.

"Oh, we've had a fine time," answered Chuck. "Dad took me to see an old friend of his that stuffs animals. You

ought to see the wild cat he's got, and the deers' heads and woodchucks and— and—piles of things."

"Get up in the back, boys, and hang your feet out. Take care of the wheels," said Father Brown. at which both boys climbed aboard.

"There's a big bearskin rug on the floor and he shot the bear himself," resumed Chuck, "away up in the mountains. His house is awfully small, just one room, with a lean-to next it. And who do you think lives in the lean-to?"

"Give it up," answered Toad.

"Why, the finest little black horse you ever saw," said Chuck, "and at night old man Hicks, for that's his name, opens the door into the lean-to and Bess, that's the

pony's name, puts her head through and old man Hicks says they talk together."

"Aw, who ever heard of a horse talking?" laughed Toad.

"Well, I'm sure he understands almost everything," said Father. "Some horses know a great deal more than you think they do."

"That's right," said Reddy. "I once heard of a horse that pulled a baby out of the water when it was drowning."

"You dreamed it, Reddy," laughed Toad.

"Old man Hicks makes paddles for the people at the lake to buy, and very fine ones, too," said Father, "and all sorts of things out of birch bark."

"Look what he gave me," said Chuck,

diving down to the floor of the buggy. "A little canoe. Isn't it a beauty?" and he held up one about ten inches long, made of birch bark.

"Let's have it, Chuck," said Reddy, holding out his hand. "Look how it's all sewed together with strips of skin."

"That's deerskin," said Father, "just like the Indians use. They call it rawhide."

"He sent a napkin ring to Mother," said Chuck. "He said Mother makes the best cookies he ever tasted. She sent him a bag of them. We took them over with us."

"Do you go to see him very often, Dad?" asked Toad. "I'd like to go with you next time."

"All right," said Father. "Be around and you can go. I always leave just after school is over," and he winked at Chuck and Reddy.

"It's a beauty!" he exclaimed. "It must weigh close to a pound."

CHAPTER II

THE LAST DAY OF SCHOOL

THE boys could hardly wait for Saturday to come.

"Perhaps we can go swimming in the creek and have a dandy time," whispered Reddy to Chuck, for it was Friday morning and they were in school.

"Hope there'll be plenty of good things to eat," answered Chuck. "I get terribly hungry when I'm outdoors all day."

"Will the class please come to order?"

asked the teacher. "There has been a great deal of whispering and I shall have to keep you all in after school if it doesn't stop at once."

"Oh, dear," sighed Toad, "I don't wonder old man Hicks likes to live away off by himself, as far away as he can get from schools and teachers."

When school was dismissed for the week the boys snatched up their hats and ran out-of-doors as fast as they could go.

"Here he comes," shouted Reddy as Fat, the last to leave the school room, came into sight.

"Hurry up! We're going to have a race to the Post Office," called Toad.

"All ready, on your mark! Get set! Go!"

They were off. At first Chuck kept the lead, with Reddy and Toad close behind, and Fat last, as usual. Then Reddy started to gain, little by little.

"Hey, Reddy, wait for me!" breathed Toad, close behind him.

"Ca-can't do it," called Reddy, over his shoulder. "I've got to beat Chuck."

Just around the corner was the Post Office.

"Go it, Red!" called Fat, far behind all the others. "You can beat him!"

And Reddy, putting all his strength into a last effort and throwing back his head, shot up the Post Office steps not five feet ahead of Chuck.

"Wow, but I'm blowed!" said Toad, as the boys sat down to rest.

"Look at slow-poke coming along," laughed Reddy.

"That's all right. I've got too much good sense to run when the weather's warm," answered Fat.

"Poor excuse is worse than not any," cried Chuck. "Guess you can't run fast because you've got so much good sense to carry."

"Well, if everybody's rested now, let's get along home," said Fat.

"What time to-morrow are you going to start?" asked Toad of Reddy, who was walking beside him, kicking up dust.

"Don't just know," answered Reddy, "but early. When are you?"

"Mother said maybe we might go in the hay wagon," said Toad.

"What fun!" cried Reddy. "Ask me?"

"Sure; all we can pile in," replied Toad.

CHAPTER III

THE START

THE next morning was bright and clear. Mother Brown was up early. There was much to do,—three fine fat chickens to roast, and the baskets to pack. The cakes and pies had been baked the day before, so they were ready.

"Run, Tommy dear," said Mother, "and bring in the baskets. I must pack them at once, for I see John and Charley hitching up the team. Now whom do you

want us to pick up on the way?" she asked as Toad returned with the things.

"Oh, let's see," said Toad. "Reddy and Fat and Herbie and Hopie Smith and Linn and——"

"Well, dear," said his mother, interrupting, "that's enough, for Dad and I are going and John will drive, for, you will remember, you wanted to do as I did and sit beside the hired man."

"Oh, Mother," cried Toad, "it's going to be as much fun as Christmas, almost," and he ran outdoors to tell Chuck how they were to stop for the boys and to find his fishing rod.

"For you never can tell," thought Toad, "I might want to fish in the stream."

At last all was ready and the baskets were piled up in front. Toad sat beside John.

"When we come to a nice straight stretch of road, you can drive," promised John; "but on the curves I'll take the lines, for the team feels lively to-day."

"All right!" answered Toad.

When they reached the house where Reddy and Fat lived they saw both boys sitting on the hitching block waiting for them.

"Hurrah!" shouted Reddy. "Here they come!" and in another minute they were both aboard the wagon.

"Going to stop for Herbie?" asked Reddy, seated alongside of Toad, who had moved over to make room for him.

"Hi, there he is now," said Toad,—"just starting off with his basket."

"Oh, Herbie!" he shouted. "Wait a minute. Come on and ride with us."

"Guess I will," answered Herbie, running up behind the wagon and, throwing his basket up to Chuck, he climbed in.

At the next corner they picked up Hopie Smith and Linn, his younger brother.

"Let's sing something," suggested Fat. "Like 'Way Down Upon the Suanee River,' " and the boys, sitting at the back of the wagon, all sang at the top of their voices. Once in a while Herbie would let himself down by his hands until his feet kicked up a cloud of dust in the road.

"It's a shame," said Mother, "that we didn't ask some one else to go along. I didn't know that the boys would take up so little room. We could have put three or four more in. Do you think, Father, we could stop for Mrs. Lee and her little girl? They may not have started yet."

"Of course," agreed Father.

Mrs. Lee had not gone and was very happy to ride with them, and little Mary, too.

Fat helped them into the wagon, and when Chuck saw little Mary he said in a low voice to Herbie:

"That's the girl that sat behind us at the circus. Remember how scared she was when the man walked on the wire?"

Mary Lee was a pretty girl. She had

golden curls and large blue eyes. Although she sat very close to her mother, she looked at the boys.

Herbie tried swinging off the back of the wagon and ducking down under so only his two hands showed up above, gripping the top of the tail-board.

"Oh!" gasped little Mary Lee.

Then Chuck jumped off the back and ran behind them. Reddy, looking round and seeing Chuck had jumped off the wagon, told Toad to drive faster to make Chuck have a good run for it. Toad then whipped up the horses and Fat and Herbie fought Chuck off the back when he finally caught up with the wagon and tried to get on.

"Oh," breathed Mary, "won't you

please let him on? I'm sure he must be very tired."

Just then Chuck made a dive for Herbie's foot, caught it, and was about to pull him off, too, when Herbie said:

"All right, I'll let you on," and helped him aboard.

Chuck glanced at Mary. She looked awfully white, he thought, and her eyes were so big, like violets with dew on them.

"Girls get scared so easily," whispered Herbie, for he had looked at Mary, too.

CHAPTER IV

THE SUCCESSFUL FISHERMEN

They passed many carriages and wagons full of laughing, happy people, young and old, all going to the picnic. At last they came to the meadow where it was to be held.

A stream of clear, sparkling water ran over a bed of red and white pebbles and great flat rocks lay in the center of the stream. Big trees lined the banks on either side.

John drove up beside the other wagons and the boys hopped out.

"Here you are, son," called Father Brown to Toad. "Help me with the baskets while John unhitches the team."

"What shall we do first?" asked Toad when the baskets had been taken out.

"If you brought your rod," asked Mother, "why don't you try to catch a few fish for lunch? Then you could build a fire on one of those flat rocks out in the stream. I'm sure if you caught any fish they would taste mighty fine with some broiled bacon."

"Oh, I know how to broil bacon tip-top!" cried Chuck. "You get a forked stick. Be sure to get a green one, so it won't burn, and then you take a strip of bacon and put it on the two ends and hold it over the fire."

"Well, I'll go and fish," said Toad. "If you want to go with me, Reddy, I'll loan you a line."

Both boys then took off their shoes and stockings on the bank of the stream and then waded up-stream until they came to a deep pool where the trees threw long, dark shadows across the water.

"Hush, now, be very quiet," whispered Toad, "for this is a fine place to catch trout. Let's crawl up on the bank and cast our lines into the deep hole."

Seated on the moss, they baited their hooks with nice fat worms and then, very quietly, let them fall over the deep part of the stream.

"The hooks will float down slowly,"

said Toad, "and while they go the fish sees the worm and makes a dash for it."

"Oh, wow! Something's got me!" cried Reddy. "I mean my hook!"

"Well," laughed Toad, "stop jumping around on one foot and pull in your line."

"Pulls so hard it must be a whale," said Reddy, getting very red in the face.

"Look out, Red. If it is it'll eat you," laughed Toad, rolling over in his mirth.

Then, as Red finally landed a good-sized trout, he exclaimed:

"By jiminy, it's a beauty! Why, it must weigh close to a pound."

"Pound, nothing. I'll bet it weighs two," said Red, carefully taking it off the hook and laying it on the bank.

Taking a piece of bacon, he held it over the fire, the others following his example.

"Wait until you see what I catch," said Toad.

"Guess I'll string him on a switch, after a while, and carry him back that way," observed Reddy.

CHAPTER V

BRINGING IN THE CATCH

"WONDER what makes the stream go so fast?" inquired Toad, a few minutes later. "Just looking at it you wouldn't notice how swift it is, but when you drop a leaf in, it just sails along. I've got a bite!" he added, standing up in his excitement. "Be quiet now and I'll land him in a minute."

In less time than it takes to tell, Toad pulled in a fish.

"Ha, ha! it isn't as big as mine," chuckled Reddy.

"That's all right," retorted Toad, "the little ones taste the best."

"Now we're even," asserted Reddy. "Bet I'll catch the next one."

"Bet you don't," returned Toad, and both boys looked intently at their lines.

"I know why the water moves so fast," declared Reddy, "it's because it's down-hill."

"Doesn't look like a hill to me," objected Toad.

"I know it; but it's a little down-hill for a long way and that gives the water a good start," was the explanation.

"Guess that's it," agreed Toad, adding: "I imagine it gets a good start after it goes over a falls. I saw a big falls once. By jiminy, it was high!"

"Where was it?" questioned Reddy.

"Up in the Catskill Mountains. They call it the Kaaterskill Falls."

"I saw Niagara once, but I can't remember it," admitted Reddy.

"Why can't you, were you asleep?" jokingly asked Toad.

"No, I was a baby," replied Reddy, at which they both laughed.

For a few moments the boys sat in silence, intent on their fishing, but suddenly the stillness was broken by Reddy exclaiming:

"Wow, I've got another bite!" But as he hurriedly jerked his line out of the water the fish flopped off the hook, accompanied by a disappointed "Oh!" from Reddy.

"I've got something, too!" cried Toad in great excitement. "But, oh, help me, Reddy, quick! It'll break the line if it pulls much harder!"

Reddy rushed to the rescue and both boys held on with all their might.

"That's no fish," shouted Toad.

"Well, we'll see in a minute," gasped Reddy, and as he spoke the end of the line came into sight.

"An eel!" they both exclaimed joyously.

"Pull him away up on the bank!" cried Reddy. "Look how he wriggles. How'll we ever unhook him?"

"You stand on his tail and I'll pull the line straight. Then you grab him by the head," suggested Toad.

"No, sir; you do it."

"All right, now watch me," and Toad made a dive for the head, but it slipped out of his hand.

"Easy as pie, isn't it?" jeered Reddy.

"Guess we'll have to take him back on the line and that means no more fishing for me to-day," said Toad.

"Well, I've had enough," admitted Reddy, as he picked up the two fish. "I'll carry yours because you'll have your hands full with that lively fellow."

"All right, I'll walk back on the bank, for if this eel ever wiggled off the line into the water it would be good-bye, Mr. Eel."

"That's so," assented Reddy, and off they started.

When the picnic came into view the boys saw a bright fire burning on the flat rock in the middle of the stream and Chuck and Linn wading through the water carrying bundles of dry wood.

Toad shouted and the boys on the rock turned toward him. Seeing Toad and Reddy, they called out:

"Hurry up, we're almost ready for dinner."

As they drew near, Father Brown asked:

"What luck?" and when he saw their catch remarked: "Well, it takes the boys to do it. That's a fine trout," pointing to Reddy's fish. "Anyone could be proud of having caught it, and that's one of the biggest eels I ever saw."

"Will you take him off the hook, Father? He's too slippery for us to handle," asserted Toad.

"With pleasure," laughed Father. "You had him well hooked, Toad, or you never could have pulled him in."

CHAPTER VI

MAKING UP POETRY

WHITE tablecloths dotted the stretch of green beside the water, and these were piled up with cake and sandwiches, pies and doughnuts, great pitchers of lemonade and so many other good things that it was hard to know where to begin.

The little girls had picked great bunches of wild flowers and placed some in the center of each cloth. Little Mary Lee had made a long daisy chain that she hung over her shoulders, and a crown for her golden hair.

"She looks just like the pictures of angels I've seen," thought Toad.

Mother Brown asked the boys if they didn't want to take their dinner over to the flat rock in the stream so they could broil their fish and bacon and eat it with their dinner.

"Why, I should say we do!" consented Fat.

"Will you let us take with us what we'd like to eat?" asked Reddy, stooping to pick up the fish and the jar of bacon near at hand.

"Of course each boy may choose what he likes best," Mother Brown replied, so a basket was brought and quickly filled with a little of everything.

"I made a big cake just for you, boys,"

she continued, "and I hope you'll all enjoy it."

"It isn't chocolate, is it?" inquired Fat, "because," he continued, "I ate so much chocolate cake once that I like any other kind better."

"It has a cream filling and cocoanut on top," was the comforting assurance.

"Oh, good!" exclaimed Fat. "Let's hurry up. I can't wait to begin."

Between them the boys carried the basket and the other things out to the rock, and to do this they had to wade through the water. Once Fat, who was in great haste, slipped on a stone, and if Chuck had not also had hold of that end of the basket, down it would have splashed into the water.

After they had reached the flat rock in safety Chuck and Fat very carefully spread out the white cloth and took the good things out of the basket. Reddy and Toad were very busy over the eel and fish, while Herbie and Linn Smith were making the coffee.

When all was ready Chuck took command.

"All sit around the fire now," he ordered, "and each one of us gets a green stick to broil some bacon on," and when all the boys were seated he handed to each a green forked stick with pointed ends. Then taking a piece of bacon from the sliced strips, he put it on the end of his fork and held it over the fire. The others hastened to follow his example.

"Looks easy," said Reddy.

"Whew, but it smells good!" sniffed Toad.

"Hope it tastes good," chuckled Herbie. "I'm hungry enough to eat it all."

"Look out there or you'll burn your piece, Fat!" exclaimed Linn.

"Oh, yummy, yummy!" mumbled Fat, putting his piece of bacon into his mouth. "Is it good? Oh, ask me!"

"Let's have the fish and eel now. Everyone pass up his plate," and Toad smiled in great good humor as he cut and served the fish and eel, which had been grilled to a golden brown.

Everyone was very busy for a few moments after he had been served.

"It's the best fish I ever ate," boasted

Reddy, "and I've eaten whole packs of them."

"Isn't the eel fine, too!" exclaimed Toad, holding a large piece up on his fork.

"Hey, Toad, you'd better leave some room for the cake and pie," advised Linn.

"Oh, there's plenty of room left yet," laughingly responded Toad. "I've only just started."

"Well, those ham sandwiches look good enough to eat," asserted Chuck. "Pass me one, Fat, like a good fellow."

"I'll start on the pie now," said Herbie.

"Oh, speaking of pie makes me think of a nice little rhyme I know," inter-

posed Reddy, "but if I say it you fellows will all have to say one, too."

"Go on," replied Toad; "we're waiting."

"All right, here goes," was the answer, as Reddy began:

"Oh, beautiful pie,
Oh, bee-yutiful pie,
I like you in my mouth,
But not in my eye."

All the boys shrieked with laughter and Fat almost choked on a piece of that bee-yutiful pie.

"Your turn, Chuck," cried Reddy.

"Does it have to be about pie?" demanded Toad.

"Yes, go on and make one up," suggested the others.

"Well, let's see," said Chuck.

"The grass is green,
The sky is blue,
I love pie,
But I don't love you."

"No good!" cried Fat. "Listen to this one:

"Oh, little pie, I love you,
To me you're very dear,
But if I eat the whole of you,
I'll have a pain, I fear."

"Oh, bully!" shouted Toad. "That's the best yet, only it's not such a little pie you love."

"Well, it's your turn now, Toad," cried the others.

"All right, fellows," boasted Toad. "Mine's a real one. Listen to this:

"Splash!" Poor Fat,—his foot had slipped and down he went.

"Oh, let us to the picnic go,
We'll laugh and sing with glee;
A June bug has climbed down my back,
I feel him at my knee.

"The milk is bad, the butter's worse,
And in the cake there's ants.
I have sat on a custard pie,
And spoiled my Sunday pants."

"Oh, fine, dandy!" shouted the boys in great glee.

"Bet you didn't make it up yourself," doubted Chuck.

"Didn't say I did," answered Toad. "I heard some one say it."

"It's a good thing we came over here. The girls would think we are 'horrid,'" chuckled Linn. "You're next, Herbie."

Herbie looked up at the blue sky thoughtfully, then burst forth with:

"I scratch my head,
I wink my eye;
And, presto! there's a custard pie.
I pull my ear,
I bite my thumb;
I turn my head
And there is none."

"That's fine, as good as yours, Toad," laughed all the boys. "Go ahead, Linn."

Linn, after a short pause, commenced:

"Oh, little fly, why do you sigh?
If I could fly, I wouldn't cry.
'Oh,' says the fly, I'll tell you why,
You ate up all the custard pie.' "

"I'll bet you did, too!" laughed Chuck with the others. "I saw you make a dive for that pie first thing."

"What are they doing over in the meadow?" exclaimed Reddy, at which they all looked where he pointed and

saw a number of boys and girls gathered in a group in the shade of one of the large trees.

"Looks like some kind of a game," suggested Herbie. "Come on, let's all go over. I've eaten all I can," at which they all started.

CHAPTER VII

FAT'S MISHAP

"Stop splashing," called Fat, as he carefully picked his way. "The water's up to my knees here and I'd get wet all over if I——" *Splash!* Poor Fat,—his foot had slipped on one of the stones and down he went as he had feared.

"Oh," screamed the others in mirth, "look at Fat, the water rat!"

Fat came up spluttering, and he did look so funny with his hair plastered sleek against his head. His shirt stuck to him as though it had been glued on.

"Oh, Merry Christmas!" shouted Toad, jumping up and down. "You didn't spill any cake, did you, Fat?"

Mother Brown, who had seen the mishap, hurried up to the boys.

"Come with me, Frank," she told him, and Fat, dripping wet, was led away toward the wagon.

"I've a dry suit of Chuck's here," said Mother, "for he always seems to be the one to fall into the water, but this time you can put it on," and hunting about inside the wagon, she found the suit and handed it to Fat, after which she joined the others.

"We're going over to get in the game," Chuck informed his mother.

"Frank won't be more than a minute,"

returned Mother Brown. "Wait for him. I think they're going to start a game of Hare and Hounds and it's great fun. The hares go first and carry with them a bag of paper cut up very fine. As they go they drop pieces here and there. This gives the hounds, who start a few minutes later, a trail to follow, and they must watch out for the little scraps, for, if they lose the trail, it might take some time to find it again."

"But where do they go?" asked Herbie.

"Why, no one knows," answered Mother Brown. "That's for the hounds to find out."

"Here's Fat!" cried Chuck, and the boys all ran off to join the group, which

was now being divided into "Hares" and "Hounds."

Most of the boys decided it would be more fun to join the hounds, but Toad and Reddy favored the hares and the sides were finally made up.

"You'll have to run your best," shouted Toad, "and then you won't catch us."

"We'll be hot on your trail in about a minute," called Chuck. "I'm going to eat you for dinner."

The hares were well away by this time and the hounds stood waiting for the word to follow.

"Jiminy, I wish I'd gone with the hares now," said Linn. "It's no fun waiting around here."

"Oh, cheer up," Chuck told him. "We'll be off in a minute and we're sure to catch most of them."

"Get ready. Get set. *Go!*" shouted the starter, and almost before one had time to think the hounds were under way.

"Here it is!" cried Chuck. "Here's the trail! Oh, they've taken to the hills! What fun!"

CHAPTER VIII

THE CLEVER HARES

THE hares, on starting off, decided to turn to the hills first.

"This will tire them out at the start," argued Toad.

"Yes, but it will tire us out, too," protested Reddy and some of the other hares.

"That's all right, we don't have to worry," Toad assured them. "I've got a fine plan. We'll go down as far as Miller's place, then we'll double back on our

tracks and take to the woods. We can go all over those woods until the trails cross and recross each other, and then—but that's a secret."

The hares had just reached the woods when the hounds started.

"This is easy. Why, the trail's plain," boasted Chuck.

"It's never easy, running," panted Fat, from behind.

In a few minutes the hounds had reached Miller's place, where the trail ended at the side of the stream.

"Well," shouted Chuck, "what does this mean? That they crossed the water?"

Mr. Miller, coming out on his door-step, laughed and said:

"No, they didn't cross the water, but I believe you'll have a time finding them. They're pretty sleek, those hares."

"Oh, we'll find them if they are above ground," insisted Chuck.

"Let's go back on the trail," suggested Herbie, "and keep a sharp lookout on each side for a cross trail."

This plan was followed and in a few moments Linn shouted:

"I've got it! Here it is; it leads to the woods!" and the pack was off again on the new trail. But when they reached the woods not a hare was to be seen. The hounds found themselves going round and round, criss-cross and back again, over the same trail.

"We're in a fix now," sighed Chuck.

"Looks as though they just took all the bags and dumped them," declared Herbie.

"This suits me all right," observed Fat. "I like anything better than running."

"Well, what are we going to do about it?" inquired some of the other hounds.

"I've followed this trail all around and back twenty times and can't find a new one," protested Linn.

"So have I," echoed a score of others.

"I'm sorry to give up the chase," admitted Fat. "I wanted to help Chuck eat that hare for dinner," at which all the others laughed.

"Well, what do you say, fellows? Give it up?" asked Linn.

"Yes," they agreed in chorus, as all started for the meadow.

They had gone but a few yards when such a shout of laughter rang through the woods that the hounds jumped, but they knew in an instant whence the shout had come, and running back they looked up into the trees. There, in the high branches, were the hares, almost hidden from sight.

"Oh," cried Toad, "didn't you get left! I could hardly keep from throwing something down at you."

"Why didn't we think to look up into the tree?" sighed Chuck. "We might have known Red would be up a tree."

By this time most of the hares had climbed or slid out of the trees, and with

laughter and talking the boys started for the meadow.

"Who won?" shouted Father Brown, as they came in sight.

"The hares," answered Toad and Reddy in one breath.

"I'm awfully glad," said Mary Lee to Reddy. "I wanted the hares to win."

"Just like a girl," thought Herbie; "because they were being chased she wanted them to win."

"Come, boys," announced Father Brown. "Time to pack up. We must start now if we want to reach home by daylight." So the boys at once commenced to gather up the baskets, which they lifted into the wagon.

Reddy and Toad lost no time in

climbing up into the front seat, but Chuck, Linn, Herbie and Fat all sat in a row across the back of the wagon, and they started for home.

"What was the best part of the day for you, Thomas?" inquired Mother Brown.

"I guess when I landed that eel," chuckled Toad.

"And you, Reddy?"

"When I was up in that tree watching those hounds," laughed Reddy.

"Well, Charley?" and Mother Brown next turned to Chuck.

"When I was broiling my bacon over the fire."

"I liked the dinner best," said Fat. "There were lots of good things to eat."

"I liked building the fire and making the coffee," said Herbie. "It was like camping out."

"So did I," agreed Linn.

"Let's give three cheers for a very happy day," proposed Father Brown.

And the boys, waving their caps, shouted with joy.

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